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RICKSHAW WRITINGS – A REAL MIRROR TO PAKISTANI SOCIETY

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ABSTRACT: Cultural diversity can be seen in many forms. One specific area of interest would be the use of language in expressing opinions related to many aspects of a society. This particular study reports on the use of culturally influenced language, in order to express opinions as reflected on auto rickshaws in Lahore, Pakistan. Data was gathered by observations while travelling to various areas in Lahore, Pakistan. The qualitative analysis of the written discourse showed various aspects of life of the Lahorites, through different modes as were reflected by the writings on the rickshaws plying throughout the town.

KEYWORDS: rickshaws, Lahorite drivers, social issues, expressions

INTRODUCTION

A rickshaw or an auto-rickshaw is a three-wheeled motorized vehicle looking like a squeaking box with wheels, used by passengers in Pakistan. "Rickshaws are always on the go, everyone sees them," (Naqvi, 2013). Though rickshaw was invented in Japan at the close of the 19th century (Gallagher 1992: 27), yet countless are whizzing around in Pakistan and being utilized by poor citizens of the country who cannot afford to have their own cars. Besides providing this basic transportation service, rickshaws have also been exploited for advertising of films, TV shows, quacks, tuition centres, restaurants. Above all rickshaws are working like a mirror of personal, social, political as well as sectarian, love and hate messages. Some of them are not only pimped up or jazzed up rather they are adorned with flowers, TV and film actresses' pictures, poetry, proverbs, certain slogans, sayings, related to women, politics, religiosity and love. In addition, all they manifest is not only commentary on social or current hot issues but also it reveals drivers' own identity, regional background, personal religious, political and in some cases sectarian beliefs in addition to its use as a canvas to market slogans of all types under the sun. These subaltern expressions reveal the aspirations, imaginations and pent up feelings of the common people working not only as a window into their minds but also as a means of catharsis manifesting the realities of life as perceived by the underdogs. However, it is also a means of expression to engage the otherwise so called educated, rich business class and political, military, bureaucratic elite dwelling in the same city, sharing the same sky and breathing the same air but using different and sophisticated modes of expressions for their respective discourse.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Despite "the draconian bill" (Khan, 2016) (Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act, 2016) has been promulgated and overreaching powers have been entrusted to law enforcement agencies to ensure that the information to be disseminated is pro-government only, yet the rickshaws in Pakistan seem out of or above the jurisdiction of all such laws. One can find every type of remarks, pieces of poetry, proverbs or songs written on rickshaws whizzing on the roads of Lahore which openly challenge the writ of the government by ignoring such laws as being hoax. Recognizing the powerful role of rickshaws in the dissemination of information of all types, Islam (2010) claimed that the best place for getting across the messages related to political please, apologies to girlfriends and price hikes is the back of their vehicles.

It is unfortunate and remorseful enough that most of rickshaw drivers are not educated but fortunately and surprisingly, they have enough refined sense and taste which is proudly exhibited on their vehicles. In

addition there are countless catchphrases in Urdu, Punjabi, English and Pushto also adorned on their rickshaws like *"Toot the horn and overtake. Urdu; Give heart and take love. Urdu; Mother's prayer is heavens' air. Urdu; God Gift. English; Mother, I salute your greatness. Urdu; If you have fair complexion; no fare will be charged of you. Punjabi; The one who is jealous has black face. Urdu; Overtake or tolerate. Urdu; I adamantly stick to my stance – Punjabi)*. In addition, Maria (2016) also observes that rickshaws exhibit funny poetry written on their backs, taking the sense of humour of Pakistanis to the next level with cheesy poetry lines that make them laugh out loud.

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of the current study is to investigate the rickshaw writings in terms of themes that emerged from the data collected for the purpose of better understanding the discourse embodied within the literature written on rickshaws specifically in Lahore, Pakistan. Fundamentally, the study investigates the following:

1. What are rickshaw writings representing in their discourse?
2. How does this discourse highlight certain issues in Pakistan?
3. How does this discourse play the role of catharsis for the underdogs?

METHODOLOGY

To achieve the objectives mentioned above, the collected pieces of writings written on rickshaws were scrutinized. For this purpose, the researchers with the help of 3 students spent almost a month on visiting different roads of Lahore to collect the data for the study which resulted in the form of various and countless writing examples. However, some of the very dominant and common themes which emerged from the data were discussed in this paper.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The findings of the study are based on the themes that emerged from the analysis of the data collected in the form of writings on the rickshaws on the roads of Lahore. The rickshaw writings embody immense variety of themes out of which the following are the most common ones which address: 1. Driver's identity 2. Love 3. Mission statements 4. Social issues 5. Food for thought 6. Mind-blowing statements.

The first theme is related to the driver's identity. Under this theme, drivers generally exhibit their introduction including name region and some time the caste: *Adamant vehicle; Handsome Rajput (caste); Look, Mahar (caste) is going; Dear, please don't be rigid, I am stubborn too; Rana (a caste), my dear, both of us have the same story*. The second theme is related to love. Certain verses, mostly in Urdu and Punjabi are written showcasing love of the driver for his beloved. Some of them reveal sadness of being left or deceived by the beloved. For example; *If you want to hunt, hunt with eyes. The sword is useless for this purpose; If I had not loved, I would not have been into rickshaw driving; I have tried luck. Now I am trying destiny. I am driving rickshaw just for the sake of an unfaithful one; Beloved, unfaithful; The style of my beloved is unique in the world. Her manners are shy but she has a drawback of being black; O, God, how unfortunate it is that her letters have stopped coming. Is it because the love has decreased or the post office has been closed*. The third theme is mission statements showing future intentions of the vehicle (surprisingly). For example; *I will become Corolla when I grow up; I will become Prado when I grow up*. The fourth theme is related to social issues which are shown on rickshaws, for example; *Dear, help load-shedding victims with the following things: nickers, hand fans, undergarment for men and women, towels, perfumes, itch guard cream, lantern, sleeping pills and above all fake assurances are much in need; The forthcoming budget will strip you off your pants or pyjamas, you will have to wear tree leaves and sing jinga la la Pakistan*. The fifth theme is related with the food for thought, for example; *Those who hurt parents drive rickshaw; Mother's prayer is heavens' air; God Gift; Mother, I salute your greatness; There is no oppression in religion; We are friends for friends and enemy for enemies; Toot horn slowly, the nation is sleeping; The dearness has taken man's life. He is selling his kids. Where have gone those*

goods: bread, clothes and house; As long as you give them every penny, the world is fantastic. The moment you stop doing it, then see how selfish the world is; This world gives grief but does not share grief. Love does not decrease if someone goes far away. The sixth themes is related to the mind-blowing statements easily to be generalized which are sad, serious, sarcastic and still some are pricelessly rib tickling and laughable. For example; *Door, please, close slowly. Mother's prayer is heavens' air; We are friends for friends and enemy for enemies; The dearness has taken man's life. He is selling his kids. Once I make a commitment, after that I do not listen even to myself; Keep distance, otherwise, you may fall in love; This world gives grief but does not share grief. Love does not decrease if someone goes far away.*

CONCLUSION

The study has implications on understanding the discourse being engaged in by the rickshaw drivers whose ideas as depicted on the back of their rickshaws represent the modes of a common people's thinking concerning their basic human needs, aspirations and the social issues which affect them so badly and deeply. The findings reveal that ideas as well as their expressions are not the monopoly and exclusive domain of the elite or the writers of great name and fame rather a common pulsating man having head and heart has got every right as well as the capability to express themselves in any form they like which may include poetry, mind-blowing statement proverbs, songs, clichés, catch phrases or sayings of some great people. Anyway, the findings are helpful for researchers to have general understanding as to how a common man in Lahore, Pakistan thinks and expresses about certain issues he confronts in day to day life. This study was limited only to the writing on the back of rickshaws in Lahore city. The future research can be conducted on rickshaw writings and the writings on vans and buses plying in Lahore as well as other cities of the Punjab and the rest of the provinces of Pakistan. This was a qualitative study and future research may employ quantitative data to understand the phenomenon under discussion.

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